



Spirited Celebration

Meet the powerhouse pros behind the Women's Cocktail Collective—they're putting a feminine face on the industry.

By Crawford McCarthy

We live in a world with unprecedented access to bar knowledge, education and products. Aisles in stores and shelves behind bars are filled with bottles like rows of books in an old library—with the world's collective liquid knowledge brought within inches of thirsty patrons like never before. Where once we were bound to the limitations of our local liquor shop, now there's access to the entire globe. But there are still barriers that make it difficult for new players, particularly women, to enter the game.

Enter the Women's Cocktail Collective. Launched in March (Women's History Month), it's a collaboration among the female powerhouses behind 10 spirits companies. They aim to give a voice to women in the industry and lead with "a belief that we are stronger together." (In that vein, the group has launched initiatives supporting the National Women's History Museum and OutSmartNYC, which works to prevent sexual violence in bars, clubs and restaurants.)

Every member of the collective lit up the conversation with passion, knowledge and excitement. I was instantly hooked into each story. Take, for instance, Lizzie and Melanie Asher, two Harvard grads who founded Macchu Pisco. Melanie is the master distiller, putting her in a club that has few other women as members. This was not a decision made by two people who saw a fiscal opportunity—pisco still hasn't gained the kind of market share as other spirits. Rather, Macchu Pisco was a lifelong ambition fueled by love for a region and a product—a dream realized through hard work, sacrifice and industry innovations in production, including encouraging farmers to grow the cleanest grapes possible, leading to a beautifully developed pisco.



What's most remarkable about the collective is the unwavering support the members have for each other, and for women in the industry as a whole. For years, the Ashers had been participating in a yearly think tank with other women in the collective prior to its inception, namely Allison Evanow, a pioneer and the mind behind Square One Organic Vodka; Kiki Braverman, of Pür Spirits, who develops various distillations spearheaded by one of the best elderflower liqueurs I've ever tasted; and Carin Luna-Ostaseski, of SIA Scotch, who may have one of my favorite brand origin stories ever. (More about that in a bit.) Every time I sat down for an interview, I was countered with questions from the women about the other brands. They each seemed more interested in making sure I would have the opportunity to speak with the other spirits founders than talking about their own stories.

And their tales are worth telling. There's Yola Mezcal's efforts to have an almost completely female-run distillery. The company uses a recipe that's been practiced since 1971 and



turns out a product that is vivid, complex and refined on the palate. Founded by Yola Jimenez with partners Gina Correll Aglietti and Lykke Li (who are pictured on the opposite page), the label came together after her grandfather's passing. In unrelenting fashion, Jimenez worked to bring mezcal to the market in Mexico City, elevating it for cosmopolitan tastes. Now, as part of the collective, the three women feel an even greater empowerment. "It feels like we aren't alone in our pursuit to give people an understanding on the liquor industry and make sure people know our perspective is that this not a competition with men, but one of pushing toward equality," says Aglietti.

The first American woman to launch a Scotch whiskey company, SIA Scotch's Carin Luna-Ostaseski shares similar sentiments. "This is a competitive industry, so at the end of the day, if we (SIA Scotch) are elevating the exposure of whiskey as a whole, everybody wins."

Following a breakup that began a journey of self-education and also led to a nearly 300-bottle collection of Scotch, Luna-Ostaseski made it her mission to educate others on

the sublime flavors and rich history of the spirit. She left a 17-year career as a creative with entertainment studios to dive into producing one of the most underappreciated spirits. If you doubt that statement, count the bottles of vodka versus Scotch at a dinner party, and then come back to me. SIA's good enough to change that, however. Open a bottle at your next gathering, and watch what happens.

It feels like a disservice not sharing everyone's story. The only respectful way to do so would be to find a book publisher. But Nicola Nice, the founder of Pomp and Whimsy, and the architect of the Women's Cocktail Collective, sums up the group's mission best: "Given how few of us (women) there are, there had always been a sense of camaraderie and a general interest in seeing each other succeed. However, in forming the Women's Cocktail Collective, we were taking this one step further by... actively pooling our resources to help each other's businesses grow. And in so doing, the goal of the collective is to amplify the voices of women in general in the industry, while giving back to the causes that most affect us." womenscocktailcollective.com